

## The Outdoorsman's Guide to Learning in Project Management

A metaphorical compass for navigating uncharted territory

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# The Outdoorsman's Guide to Learning in Project Management

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## Introduction

Evaluating, assessing and taking action in complex projects is difficult and chaotic.

This is largely due to project managers and project owners **having assumptions** of the scope, purpose, context and people or **not being able to acquire** the necessary information prior, during and after a project has run its course [5].

Different logics for how to think as a project manager have been proposed [3] as well as different settings of a project [4]. Most normative methodologies for solving these problems have been derived from contexts with a fairly stable environment with a focus on actions while proposals for complex contexts are based on description and explanation [5].

We propose a narrative [2] logic to break down the project management process components for future scenario design and learning reviews and combine this with metaphors [6] that indicate competencies and future strategies.

Questions of interest for the research in progress here are:

- How useful are the logics?
- How useful are the breakdowns into game pieces?
- How useful are the metaphors to your practice?

| Assumptions and learning | Description  | Logic in use  |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Known known              | We assume that we know where we are going and what to meet                       | <b>Simple:</b> Techno-rational, functionalistic                       |
| Unknown known            | We assume that we know where we are going but not how we will go there           | <b>Complicated:</b> Systems-oriented,                                 |
| Known unknown            | We assume that we do not know where we are going but we know how to go there     | <b>Complex:</b> Humanistic social relativism, systemic, unpredictable |
| Unknown unknown          | We assume that we do not know where we are going and do not know how to go there | <b>Chaos:</b> No discernable logic                                    |

Table 1: showing the logics of each type of a project state perceived by stakeholders

## Method - the case

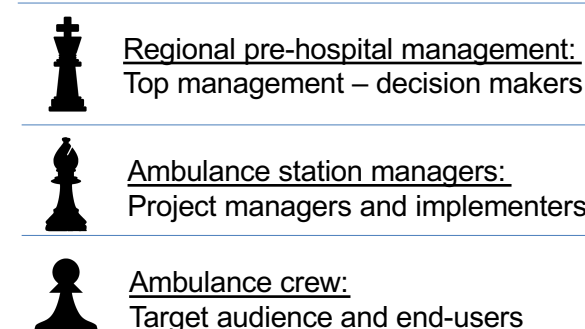
1.5 years running course of an electronic ambulance record procurement project with a purpose on learning. 22 interviews, continuous observations of impacted practice.

Dividing the process into game pieces:

### Phases



### Actors



| Metaphor               | Description   | Strategy   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Path-finding           | Involves translating a known map to the real world and combine it with known tools for optimal solutions.   | Solve problems with existing best practice methods and tools.  |
| Mountain-climbing      | Involves knowing the goal and direction but not the road and the specific conditions may only become clear upon very thorough scrutiny.   | Spend long time to analyse the existing setting and continuously review results based on the most appropriate tool used. |
| Wilderness exploration | Involves packing the hiking kit tightly and wisely for an unknown amount of time and the specific conditions need to be reacted to with few possibilities of do-overs due to limited resources. | Focus on relations and emergent norms, attitudes and mental frames among the central stakeholders.                       |
| Forest fire escape     | Very little strategy involved and sometimes one must defy logic and act and be prepared to engage with unforeseen consequences.   | Hard interventions and minor experimental and incremental assessment   |

Table 2: showing the corresponding metaphors, descriptions and strategies to take

## The compass

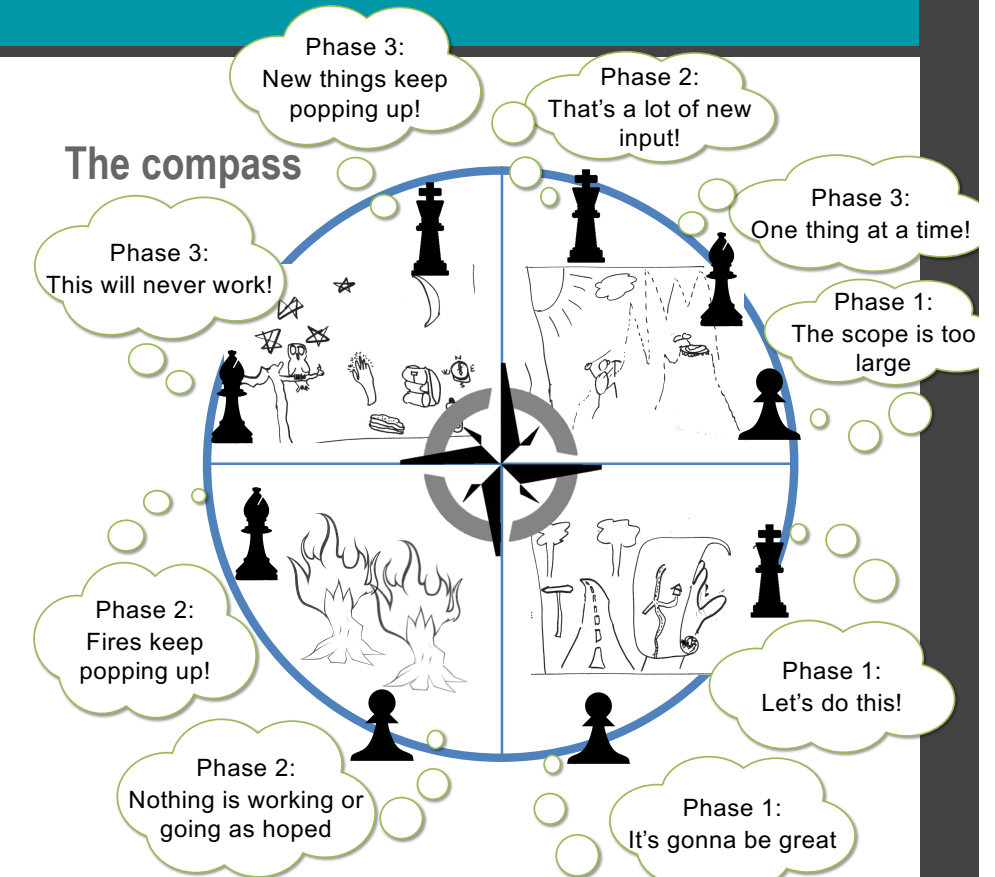


Figure 1: A descriptive framework for placing stakeholders into contexts by using the phases: a compass for reflecting on a) which assumptions and learning logic oneself is in, and b) metaphors that can indicate actions in the specific type of terrain. The figure shows how different actors made sense of the events in an incongruent manner during the project.

## Conclusions and future research

- Condenses complicated project management processes into processable pieces
- Combines process with state assessment for valuable review
- Stakeholders have "states" in their minds throughout the phases
- Proposal to use as a tool-oriented decision support system to choose project management methodology, approach and techniques

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